



# Update on the Commission's Improving Teacher Quality Grants Program

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The Commission's Improving Teacher Quality (ITQ) Program is in the midst of its 2008 competition to provide teacher professional development grants to California colleges and universities. The program, part of the No Child Left Behind Act's Title II-A, funds projects that help current teachers improve their content knowledge and classroom skills, leading to improved student achievement. The program has been operated by the Commission for more than 20 years.

## The 2008 Request for Proposal

The 2008 Request for Proposals was released in early March. Technical assistance meetings to explain the specifics of this year's initiative to potential proposers were held in early April in Sacramento and in Orange County. The initiative targets the achievement gap in elementary schools. It requires proposers to use a whole-school approach and develop teacher leaders who can help turn around failing schools. There was high interest in the initiative. More than 40 teams from universities and colleges initially considered applying. A total of 30 proposals were received by the Commission's May 13 deadline.

The proposed projects are scattered throughout the state — from the Hoopa Valley in Humboldt County to the San Diego area. The majority, 18, are from California State University campuses, the predominant providers of teacher preparation in California. Five are from University of California campuses, six from independent universities, and one is a joint CSU/UC proposal. Although about half of the proposals are in multiple subjects — consistent with this year's focus on elementary schools — 13 focus on science, mathematics, or a combination of the two. This pattern was also seen in the 2007 K–2 initiative, because few elementary teachers with multiple-subject credentials have sufficient science or math coursework to effectively teach those subjects. Elementary educators have been eager to expand their science or math expertise through ITQ grants.

The proposals are now being reviewed by three panels of readers. The readers will meet in late June to determine which proposals are worthy of further consideration. These proposals will proceed to interviews conducted by project staff and readers, which will result in recommendations for projects to be funded by early August. This two-step process that uses panels of expert peer reviewers has been successful for the Commission in the past, and has earned a commendation from the U.S. Department of Education in 2005.

## Federal Monitoring Visit

In mid-April, a team of representatives from the U.S. Department of Education visited the Commission as part of their periodic program monitoring of Title II-A programs. The team spent most of its time in California visiting school districts in the Los Angeles area and meeting with California Department of Education (CDE) Title II staff. The team spent two hours meeting with the ITQ staff and other Commission staff to discuss how the program is carried out and to learn more about specific grants. At the conclusion of the meeting, the team requested that the Commission staff improve its monitoring protocols, with a greater assurance that each project receives at least one visit or desk review each year. The visiting team indicated that they might issue a finding that the Commission should increase its on-site or desk monitoring of projects.

Given our budget constraints, it is difficult to assure that Commission staff will be able to monitor every project in the field every year, although our work is supplemented to some degree by project visits by the project's Assessment and Dissemination Team. ITQ staff is seeking other models of effective monitoring instruments and protocols, and has met with CDE staff to coordinate a joint response to the federal agency's final report. The Commission is required to respond to any findings within 60 days.

### **Meeting with Deans of Schools of Education**

ITQ Program Administrator Karen Humphrey was recently invited to a meeting of the Deans of Schools of Education from all teacher training institutions in California. State Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O'Connell has invited the deans to meet annually to discuss teacher preparation issues. The deans have found these meetings to be very productive and are committed to meeting at least annually, with a smaller committee representing CSU, UC, and independent universities shaping their agenda on an ongoing basis.

The meeting focused on culturally competent pedagogy and on addressing the needs of English learners — two topics closely linked with the achievement gap seen among California's students. At the meeting, Ms. Humphrey initiated conversations to help expand the awareness of deans of the ITQ program in order to attract additional and better proposals in the future. More information on developments after this meeting will be presented orally at the Commission meeting.

ITQ staff will continue working with the deans' group and the Superintendent's P-16 Council to help improve both pre-service teacher preparation and in-service teacher professional development and to expand its reach among teachers.